



Education Committee

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Student Representatives

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Position Statement:

The State of Iowa Youth Advisory Council supports legislation mandating student liaisons on district school boards.

Position

It should be the position of the State of Iowa Youth Advisory Council, the voice of Iowa's youth, that legislation which mandates student liaisons on Iowa school boards be enacted. This allows a student perspective on policies and influences that would affect the education and wellbeing of students in schools. The facilitation of information between school boards, administrators and the student body is essential to a well-functioning district.

Rationale

Students within Iowa have long been representatives of change, within both education and social activism. Student groups such as our own SIYAC, Youth Leadership Initiative, Iowa Student Learning Institute, and Community Youth Concepts, have been paving the way for student voice and representation. Iowa's students have been working in groups like these for years to expand youth representation and leadership. But progress can be faster.

The purpose of Iowa's school boards is to operate in the best interest of students and run the school district effectively. Most school board members are parents, teachers, and active community members. The problem many school board members face is that they operate entirely separate from students. Board members decide how the school will operate, but without knowledge of a student perspective. With the addition of a student liaison to the school board, board members can receive an accurate picture of student life at the school and learn how students are affected by changes in the district.

The most important and central part of education are the students, but yet they lack the power to represent themselves. The Iowa State Board of Education is already leading on this front, allowing a nonvoting student board member to serve a 1-year term. Mandating that Iowa's school districts adopt a similar approach to student board members would give students a better hold on their education.

In comparison, students who live in the state of California have been experiencing this student voice movement for about 45 years now. In 1972, the California state department of education reported that they encouraged local school boards to consider roles for students on school boards. About 30 years later in 2003, the California School Board Association estimated that 50% of California district school boards with high schools have a student board member (Fletcher). The encouragement that California enacted in 1972 carried through to have strong effects on half of the school districts in the state, and students want to see that same thing here in Iowa.

With the help of Representative Art Staed, HF2358 was introduced two years ago to address this issue. This bill made it to subcommittee where it was recommended passage by 2017 Representatives Jacobson, Rogers and Steckman. In March of 2018, this bill was referred to the education committee of the House and has not been reviewed since. A mandate that would require no fiscal note to enact, the revival of this bill seeks to expand social norms across Iowa to include students.

Recommended Action

To best ensure that school boards do have a position for a student representative, SIYAC strongly encourages that collaboration between the Iowa Department of Education and relevant parties takes place. This could take many forms, but the main objective will be to share any relevant documentation of school board members the Department collects.

SIYAC strongly encourages adding student representatives to school boards. The government has an obligation to help and meet the needs of Iowa's next generations. Giving a voice to those who are directly impacted by new district policies will help to better improve school and education systems.

Regards,

Education Committee
State of Iowa Youth Advisory Council

Sources

1. <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/law/iowaCode>
2. Fletcher, A. and Kunst, K. (2015) Students on School Boards Toolbox. Olympia, WA: Sound Out. Retrieved [11/21/2017] from <http://soundout.org/students-on-school-boards-toolbox>.